

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DAVID R. HINSON, FEDERAL
AVIATION ADMINISTRATOR, BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION, CONCERNING
AVIATION SAFETY. JANUARY 12, 1995.**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee today on the subject of the safety of our Nation's air transportation system. It is important and, indeed, critically so, to have a responsible public dialogue on this topic, which has been on many people's minds in light of the several recent accidents we have experienced. Following these tragic accidents, some elements of the media have properly characterized the high levels of safety offered by our air transportation system, while others have, in my view, sensationalized the issue, calling into question the degree of safety American travelers are afforded when they fly. What some media stories have failed to note is that, despite the accidents we experienced this past year, the accident rate for the larger (Part 121) carriers was the second lowest in history, and the accident rate for the commuter airlines was the lowest ever.

The simple fact is that the safety of our air transportation system is unparalleled in any other mode of transportation or, for that matter, in any other system elsewhere in the world. This record has been achieved despite the fact that our airways are the busiest in the world, with our Nation's airlines having flown more than half a billion people more than half a trillion miles last year. An airline trip is about 25 to 30 times safer than travel on our safest roads, the Interstate highways.

The long-term trend in air travel reflects a record of substantial and continuous improvements, as shown on the charts attached to my prepared statement. In fact,

if one were to apply the 1961 Part 121 airline accident rate per 100,000 flight hours to today's level of traffic, we would have experienced 265 accidents this past year, of which 35 would have been fatal accidents. Instead, we experienced 22 accidents, of which 4 were fatal. Clearly, substantial progress has been made. But, just as clearly, it is not enough, because, applying today's extremely low accident rate to projected future traffic levels, we would see 55 airline accidents in the year 2020, or more than 1 accident a week. That prospect is not and cannot be acceptable to any of us.

What becomes a difficult task, then, for the FAA and the aviation industry as well--since safety is a shared responsibility--is to identify and act on those measures that will help us drive down the existing accident rate. Given the dramatic safety improvements that have been made over the past several decades, and the statistically small number of accidents that occur in today's air transportation system, that job becomes increasingly more difficult. The closer we get to achieving a "0" accident record, the greater the difficulty in achieving further reductions in the accident rate since the randomness of accidents increases. As FAA Administrator, it is my responsibility to see that we put into place the framework within which to achieve those incremental improvements in safety. During my 17 months in that role, I have worked closely with FAA's extremely professional and dedicated employees to do just that.

We have continued to take responsible steps to build on the solid regulatory and operational framework that has made our aviation system so successful and safe. We have acted, for example, during my tenure, to propose crew pairing requirements. We have implemented rules for training and checking in ground icing conditions. We have set limits on flight attendant duty time.

Probably the greatest untapped potential for improvement in system safety lies in the human factors area, since between 70% and 80% of aviation accidents are attributed to the human element. Human factors is the single greatest area in which safety advancements can be made. FAA efforts in this area have resulted in cockpit resource management, or CRM, focusing on improved communications and coordination among crewmembers, and in increased use of simulators, which can provide more realistic training for flight crews in perfect safety.

Having seen the success of cockpit resource management training for Part 121 airlines, I initiated the process last year of bringing the commuter airline pilot training requirements into alignment with the advancements we had recently made with those large airlines. We have now expanded that effort so that Part 121 requirements, generally, will be applied to commuter airline aircraft with 10 or more passenger seats. This is consistent with recommendations of the National Transportation Safety Board, and is a top priority rulemaking for the FAA. We believe that the upgrade of commuter airline safety requirements will afford a higher degree of safety to passengers, and will also help bolster public confidence in commuter travel.

In response to the airline accidents we saw this past year, Secretary Peña and I hosted a 2 day airline summit on aviation safety earlier this week. This conference, attended by over 1,000 airline executives, pilots, maintenance personnel, and FAA safety personnel, was held both to reinforce to key aviation personnel our commitment to safety and to develop new approaches for enhancing safety. Sessions were conducted on a wide-range of safety topics including weather, maintenance procedures, flight operations, and air traffic control. I believe this conference helped foster a spirit of cooperation and climate within

which we will seek added ways of improving safety in our air transportation system.

As I committed to you during my confirmation process, I have worked to assure that the FAA responds promptly and responsibly to recommendations we receive from the National Transportation Safety Board. I have met with both the prior and current Board Chairmen, and my staff meets on a recurring basis with the Board's technical staff. Additionally, in response to concerns you and other Members earlier expressed, Mr. Chairman, about the public availability of information on FAA responses to NTSB recommendations, we have taken steps to make that information available on-line to the aviation community and the public. Although there will periodically be cases where we have technical differences with the Board, I can assure you that we do and will continue to give full and serious attention to each Board recommendation.

We are continuing to make improvements in our safety surveillance activities. We now have underway a special program to conduct audits of every U.S. airlines' safety system. FAA safety inspectors are working vigorously to complete that effort. This concentrated effort, which is a supplement to our normal surveillance efforts, will give us added perspective of safety improvements that may be needed, and will provide increased impetus to carriers to assure their programs are in compliance with FAA's standards.

To meet the needs of special surveillance programs such as this, as well as expected growth in air transportation, we are supplementing our aviation safety inspector and aircraft certification workforce by 300 new positions in 1995, and have plans to hire more. We have acted to increase this safety workforce in spite

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of our overall efforts to streamline and downsize the agency, under which we will have reduced our full time employment (FTE) level by 5,350 by the end of fiscal year 1995. This targetted increase in safety staffing will help me make further improvements and refinements to our surveillance program.

Having had the opportunity now to assess the FAA's organizational structure, I acted recently to reorganize the FAA along functional lines to achieve sharp delineations of operational and safety authority and responsibility. A key element of this reorganization is the establishment of a new office whose sole responsibility will be system safety analysis. The head of that office will report directly to me, and will provide me an independent voice within the agency on emerging safety issues. This will help me continue to stress within the agency the need to identify and act on potential safety problems as quickly as we can.

It is imperative that we be proactive in all of our safety programs. We must focus on recognizing potential safety problems, and act firmly and quickly to prevent their occurrence. Although I believe we generally do a good job in this area--for example, this past fiscal year we issued 377 final Airworthiness Directives to correct unsafe conditions on aircraft, of which about 95% were issued based on incidents rather than accident data--I am confident that we can and must continue to improve.

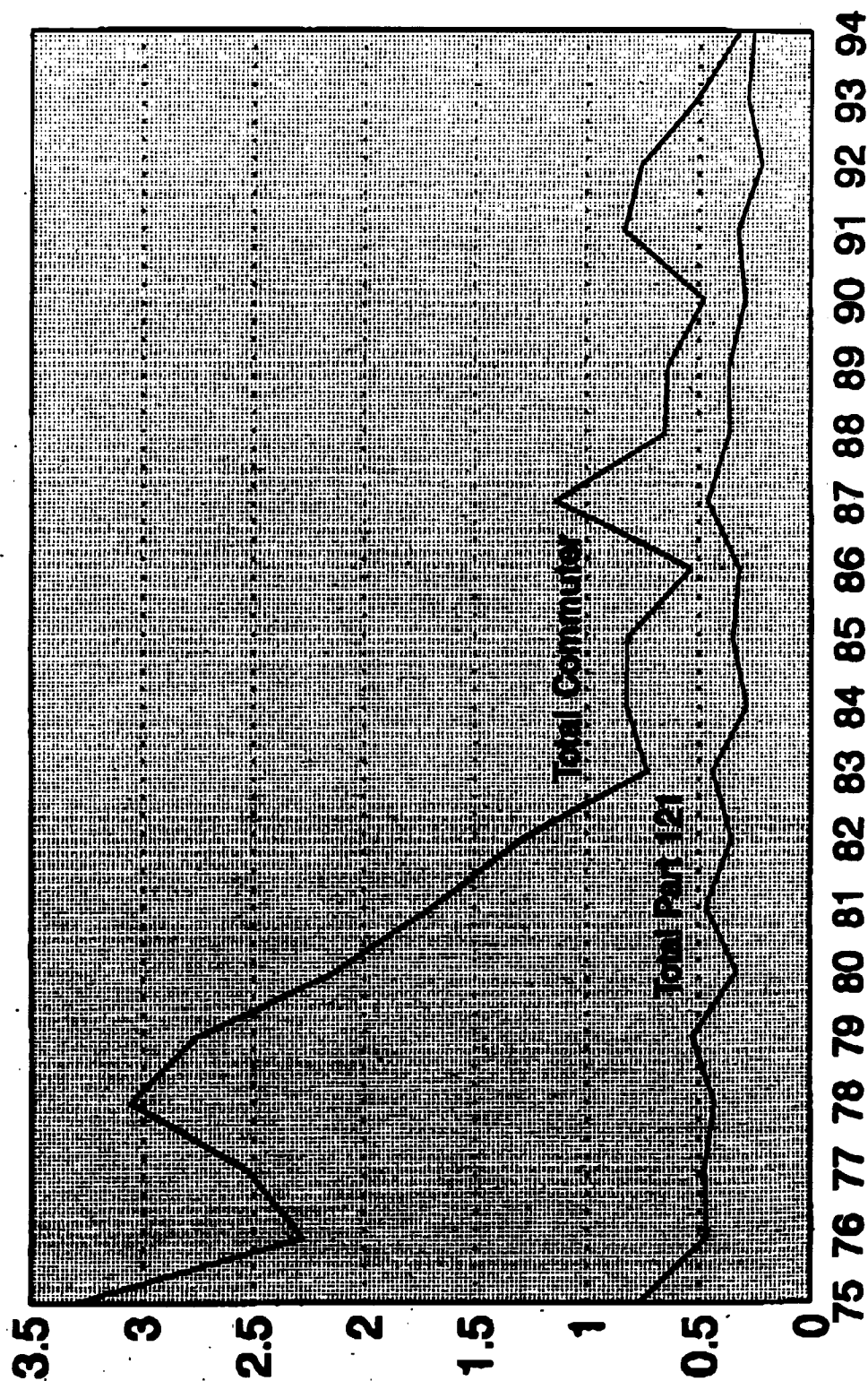
Before closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to briefly touch on the status of our efforts to implement the public aircraft changes you were recently instrumental in enacting. Shortly after enactment of that legislation, we undertook an extensive outreach effort to notify governmental entities of the new legislative provisions. We will be issuing shortly an amendment to our regulations to incorporate the new

statutory changes. We have nearly completed a draft advisory circular, which will be published in the Federal Register, to apprise governmental entities of their new responsibilities and obligations under the new public aircraft statute. We also plan a symposium to bring together interested operators to address concerns about how the new law will affect governmental flight operations, and we are taking steps to train our inspector personnel in these new requirements. I am confident that the changes you have helped bring about will benefit safety, and we will be pleased to keep you apprised of our efforts in this area.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to assure the American traveling public that travel on American air carriers is safe, and that the FAA will aggressively guard the safety of that system. Our goal, Mr. Chairman, is an environment of zero accidents. That will always be our goal.

That completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to questions that you may have at this time.

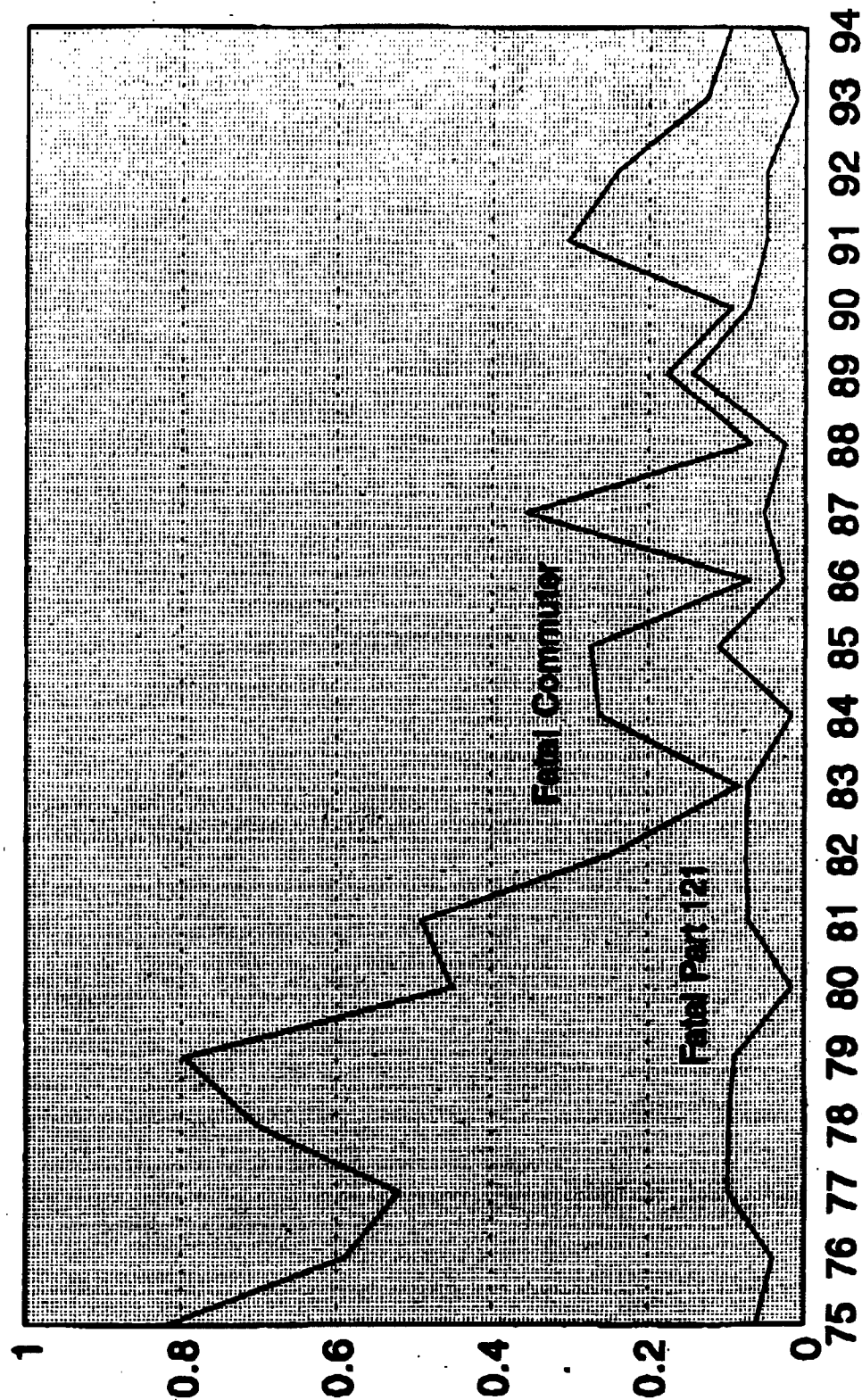
U.S. Commercial Accident Rates Accidents per 100,000 Departures 1975 - 1994



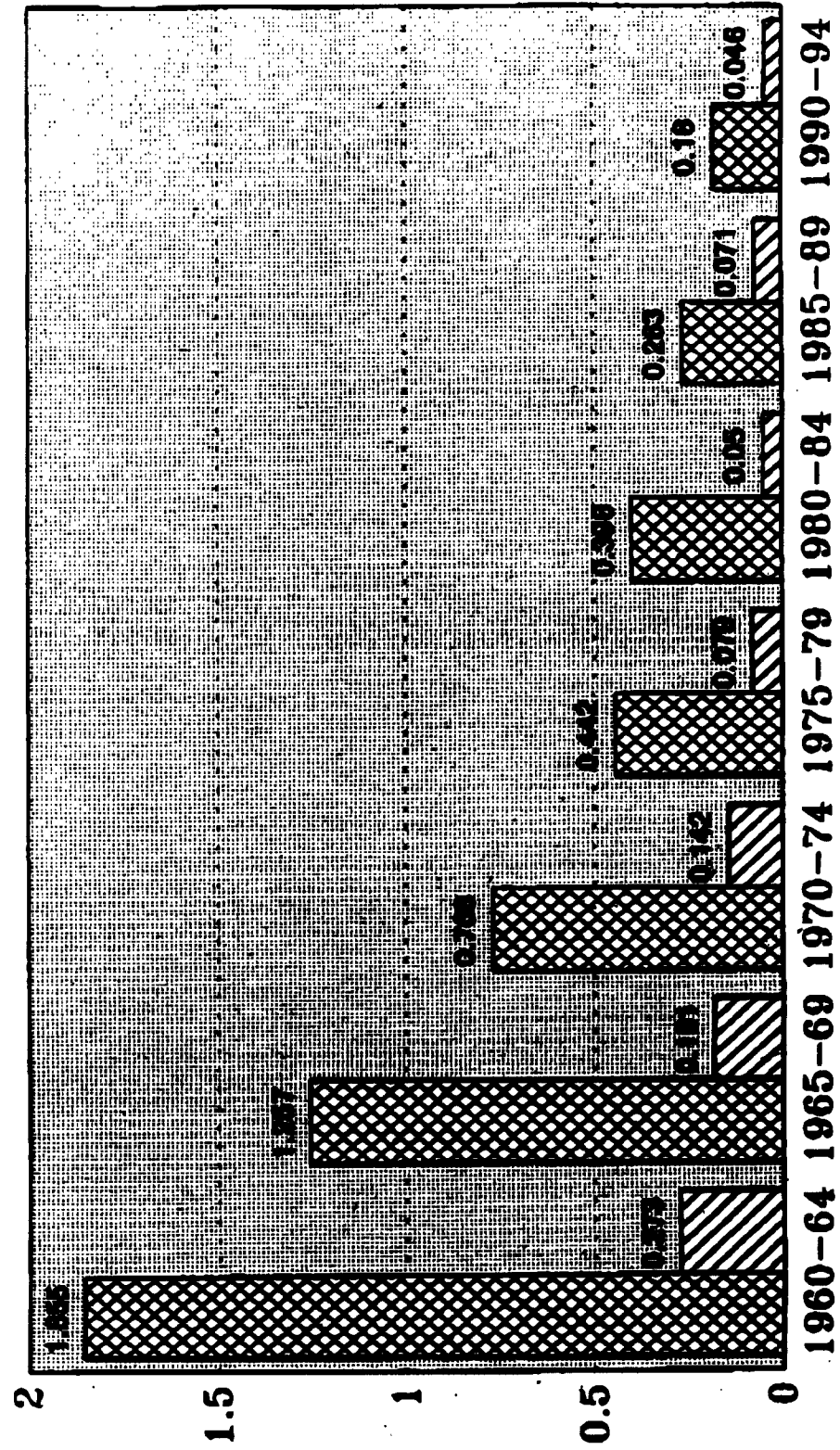
U.S. Commercial Accident Rates

Accidents per 100,000 Departures

1975 - 1994



Part 121 Accident Rates Accidents per 100,000 Departures 1960 - 1994



Accident Rate Fatal Accident Rate

Data for 1994 is preliminary and subject to change.